

WASHINGTON – The new year ushered in an important new Medicare benefit sponsored by U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus for men over 50.

Under a provision introduced by Bachus in 1997 and signed into law as part of the 1997 Balanced Budget Act, Medicare began covering annual prostate cancer screening tests for Medicare-eligible men over age 50 on January 1.

"The new year brings lower out-of-pocket costs and better health care for 18 million older men who are eligible for this new benefit," said Bachus. "The old saying 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' is especially true when it comes to health care, and now more Americans will receive the preventive care they need to live longer, healthier lives."

Nationally, more than 334,000 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer this year and 41,000 will die from the disease, according to the American Cancer Society, which supports extending Medicare coverage to prostate cancer screening. Prostate cancer is second only to lung cancer as the leading cause of cancer death among men.

"If we are to have any chance of changing these horrible statistics, screening for early detection is absolutely critical. Early detection saves lives," Bachus said.